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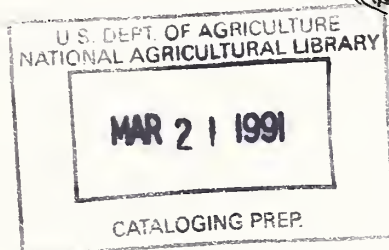
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Habitat management for

NON GAME BIRDS



In Kansas

The current field checklist of birds of Kansas lists 414 species that have occurred in Kansas. Of that total 367 are classified as nongame birds, the remaining 47 species including waterfowl are classified as game birds. Many birds are permanent residents and are found in Kansas year-round. Others merely pass through the state during spring and fall migrations. The majority of nongame birds which nest in Kansas are here only a portion of their yearly cycle. They spend their winters in the south where the climate is not as harsh.

Many of us enjoy having birds around our homes and work. Birds are among nature's most beautiful creatures. Birds are attracted to farms, ranches, and urban areas by combinations of habitat which meet their daily requirements. In addition to helping control insects and small rodents, birds offer many hours of pleasure to people who enjoy seeing and listening to them.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for human enjoyment of nongame wildlife exists in the observation of nongame birds. Bird watching is already an extremely popular activity, and the enjoyment derived from observing nongame birds is an important activity both economically and aesthetically.

LIFE HISTORY

Life histories of birds are quite variable. Their individual life requirements are so different that competition between most species is relatively small. This fact accounts for the large number of different species that are able to co-exist within the same area. The large number of birds hatched each year is necessary because of the high annual death rate which can range from 50 to 90 percent. Occasionally small birds live 10 years or more, but most of them die within their first or second year. Many birds have interesting life patterns which

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can be fascinating to observe. Some mate for life while others change mates each year. Some build sturdy nests while others simply lay their eggs in a depression on the ground. A few do not build nests at all but lay their eggs in the nests of other birds for them to hatch and care for. Every species of bird is different in some particular manner which separates it from other birds.

HABITAT NEEDS

The daily requirements of birds are food, water, and areas where they can nest and seek shelter from predators and severe weather. They can be attracted to farmstead or suburban homes by providing these requirements. Any desired species can usually be attracted by providing its preferred food and nesting habitat. Habitat preferences for individual species are listed in some bird identification and field guide books. Increasing the diversity of a "habitat" or living area will attract more types of birds, as well as other wildlife.

Food--Food is probably the most important item in a bird's life, and winter and early spring are often times of food shortages. A bird's ability to survive during these critical periods is dependent upon the availability of high energy food. Readily available food is also needed to feed young birds after they are hatched. Most young birds have huge appetites. Some young birds will eat the equivalent of their own weight of insects each day. Major categories of food include: insects, seeds, berries and fruits, fish, animal matter, and nectar. Food selection is dependent upon availability and preference by individual species.

Water--Most birds require water year-round for drinking and bathing. Water should be well distributed throughout the area.

Cover--Different types of cover are required during the year including: nesting cover, winter cover, brood-rearing cover, loafing cover, feeding cover, roosting cover, and escape cover. The presence of all types of cover within a small area will attract the greatest variety of birds.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

Birds may be attracted to any area by managing and improving the diversity of existing habitat or by creating new habitat. Plantings in urban yards, rural gardens, or around farms will attract birds.

Food may be supplied by plantings of grasses, forbs, trees, shrubs, or domestic grains. Plantings for winter food should include evergreens and fruiting shrubs such as autumn olive, dogwood, and honeysuckle which retain their fruit over the winter months. Millets, grain sorghum, corn, soybeans, and wheat may be left standing in areas next to suitable cover to provide food. Providing the widest variety of food sources will retain the greatest number of birds. It is important to continue feeding all winter if you start in the fall. Birds fed regularly will continue to be available for observation.

For winter-time viewing, various types of feeders such as platform, ground, suet, hopper, and swinging, attract different types of birds. Several feeders are usually better than a single one because some species tend to drive others away from food. A variety of food such as suet, cracked nuts, corn, milo, bread crumbs, sunflower seeds, apples, raisins, oatmeal, and peanut butter can be provided at the feeders.

Water for drinking and bathing will help attract birds. Farm ponds are an excellent source of water for birds. Birdbaths are recommended around homes and urban areas. Birdbaths should be placed in the shade and kept filled with clean water.

Adequate cover for nesting and escape should be provided close to feeding areas. Unmowed grass areas for ground nesting birds may be provided in urban as well as rural settings. Trees which provide nesting cavities should be left during woodland harvesting and thinning operations. Trees and shrubs which provide good nesting and escape cover include evergreens, osageorange, hawthorn, multiflora rose, and autumn olive. Creating natural plant communities that are attractive to birds will assure you that some kinds of birds will be present throughout the year.

Uniform cover conditions tend to limit the number of species, whereas diversity usually increases the number of both species and individuals. This is merely another way of saying that a farm with a woodlot, shrubbery, brushy gullies, hedgerows, pond, creek, grassy swale, native grass areas, standing milo, and with ordinary crop stubble, can harbor much more wildlife than can a farm that has only stubble, only standing corn, or any other uniform environment. In addition to being diverse, cover should be well distributed, but not too widely.

The location of cover is important. Cover without food is worthless. Dense shelter, food-producing areas, nesting cover, and other necessities must be provided, and the more unit areas furnishing all these requirements throughout the year, the more wildlife there will be.

Retaining nesting and escape cover in rural areas benefits nongame as well as game birds. Maintaining field borders, windbreaks, hedgerows, and odd areas will provide the needed cover areas. Planting more of these areas will increase numbers of all birds.

Birdhouses, nest boxes, and platforms may be provided as nesting substitutes in urban areas or woodlands which lack mature trees. Birdhouses should be cleaned each fall prior to a new nesting season to prevent the spread of disease and parasites. Desired species may be attracted by erecting birdhouses having proper size and shape of entrance holes and location of the house.

Most wild North American birds, are protected by state and federal regulations. It is illegal to capture, hold, transport, or kill any protected species and to take or otherwise destroy their nest or eggs.

To obtain more specific information on local birds, their relative abundance, when and where to find them, contact your local Audubon Society chapter, or the Kansas Fish and Game Commission.

The Soil Conservation Service, local conservation districts, Kansas Fish and Game Commission, and Kansas Cooperative Extension Service offer guidance on soil, water, plant, and wildlife management.

Reference Books for Identification and Habitat of Birds

A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America, Fourth Edition, by Roger Tory Peterson. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 1980. 384 p.p.

Birds of Kansas by Kansas Ornithological Society, Topeka, Kansas. 1979. (checklist)

Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification by C. Robbins, B. Bruun, and H. Zim, Golden Press Inc., New York. 1966. 340 p.p.

Invite Birds to Your Home: Conservation Plantings for the Midwest by Wade H. Hamor, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, PA-982, 1971. (pamphlet)

The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds by John K. Terres. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1980. 1100 p.p.

The New Handbook of Attracting Birds by Thomas P. McElroy, Jr. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York. 1977.



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